



Jefferson's Second Revolution: The Election Crisis of 1800 and the Triumph of Republicanism

Susan Dunn

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The election of 1800 was a revolution in the modern sense of a radical new beginning, but it was also a revolution in the sense of a return to the point of origin, to the principles of 1776. Federalist incumbent John Adams, and the elitism he represented, faced Republican Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson defeated Adams but, through a quirk in Electoral College balloting, tied with his own running mate, Aaron Burr. A constitutional crisis ensued. Congress was supposed to resolve the tie, but would the Federalists hand over power peacefully to their political enemies, to Jefferson and his Republicans? For weeks on end, nothing was less certain. The Federalists delayed and plotted, while Republicans threatened to take up arms.

In a way no previous historian has done, Susan Dunn illuminates the many facets of this watershed moment in American history: she captures its great drama, gives us fresh, newly drawn portraits of the founding fathers, and brilliantly parses the enduring significance of the crisis. The year 1800 marked the end of Federalist elitism, pointed the way to peaceful power shifts, cleared a place for states' rights in the political landscape, and set the stage for the Civil War.

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